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Tennessee Library Support Staff Want Equitable Compensation, Career Ladders, and Continuing Education: TLA Survey Results

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Introduction

The working environment of both professional librarians and support staff within United States libraries has rapidly evolved over the last two decades due to a variety of technological and financial factors. Well-documented trends such as library automation, copy-cataloging, shrinking budgets, and tiered reference desks have affected almost all library jobs. Emerging trends, such as the information commons model, e-reference services, e-enhanced patron empowerment features, and the increasing reliance on electronic resources, further increase the complexity of library work. Some of these recent developments have allowed support staff to assume duties that were formerly performed only by professional librarians. In many cases, the additional duties that accompany these emerging trends have come with no corresponding increase in compensation.

While the typical patron doesn't differentiate between the professional librarian and the support staff worker, employees are hired, assigned work, paid, and promoted according to these classifications. Recognizing that changes in library work were rapidly transforming the duties and needs of both library support staff and professional librarians, in 1996 the Executive Board of the ALA Support Staff Interests Round Table (SSIRT) appointed a Strategic Planning Process Steering Committee to identify the concerns of support staff and to recommend strategies to address their most pressing needs. The results were released in 1997 (1).

In 2004, members of the Tennessee Library Association Paraprofessional Roundtable (TLA-PPRT) conducted a survey to develop the organization's agenda and to determine whether problems reported in the 1997 ALA Support Staff Interests Round Table (SSIRT) survey were similar to those affecting Tennessee workers. Respondents answered questions concerning pay, educational opportunities, their membership in professional organizations, their possibilities for advancement, and ways their job responsibilities have changed over the course of their career. The goals of this survey were to identify

concerns of Tennessee support staff, to discover concerns that might not have been reported in former surveys, and to see if, during the seven-year interval between surveys, the problems might have been reduced or remedied.

Literature Review

In his 1995 essay, “Library Support Staff in an Age of Change,” Larry Oberg acknowledges that, “today, paraprofessionals administer major functional areas of our libraries, are assigned reference and information desk duties, perform a variety of systems work, and catalog most of the books that are added to our collections” (2). The technical services units of most libraries, particularly, utilize paraprofessional staff. Bordeianu and Seiser report in a 1998-99 survey that 84.5 percent of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) responding utilize paraprofessionals for copy cataloging while 67 percent allow paraprofessionals to do original cataloging (3). While these paraprofessionals may work alongside librarians, they are often paid significantly less.

Changing technology within libraries has played a role in this apparent blurring of the lines between job classifications. Computer technology has served as a vehicle for the development of copy cataloging, allowing paraprofessionals to do jobs also performed by professional catalogers. Oberg observes another, less noticeable, effect caused by technology. “As librarians turn their attention to the design, the evaluation, and the teaching of new resources and services, support staff will become increasingly accountable for service delivery, in other words, for the operation of the library (4). ”The increasing presence of technology in all aspects of the library has certainly affected ways that library paraprofessionals see and do their work. Dorothy Jones’ 1998/1999 survey reveals that while most support staff have a fairly positive attitude toward workplace technology, they also feel that technology has increased their workload (5). Jones reports that staff feel a pressure to work harder, which can lead to demoralization when this increased workload is not accompanied by increased rewards. “Support staff know that much of what they do is not clerical or secretarial although they are often still paid on a clerical scale" (6). Jones further reveals that

lack of attention to workload changes and to recognition of good work are among the most severe causes of demoralization and disappointment for support staff. The responses to the questions on workload and responsibilities, along with extra comments written on the survey returns, seem to indicate that, as the number of support staff decreases, remaining staff consistently take on heavier workloads and more responsibility, but that there is little tangible reward for doing so. While appreciative words and added trust exhibited toward an employee are desirable, universities and their libraries really need to address salaries and the distribution of merit raises. (7)

These issues of pay equity, personnel utilization, and role blurring are explored in an influential 1992 paper by Larry Oberg, Mark Mentges, P.N. McDermott, and Vitoon Harusadangkul. This work compares responses from Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and Carnegie Classification libraries concerning a myriad of topics, including "the education, skills, and other competencies required of paraprofessionals, the tasks and levels of authority assigned them, the salaries and staff development incentives offered, (and) the potential of their contribution" (8). As of 1990, this survey offered the most comprehensive

depiction of the working conditions of support staff in academic libraries. In the introduction, the authors mention what may be one of the greatest dangers of role blurring to the library profession, that "role blurring confuses the library's clientele and contributes to the generalized impression that there is little difference between the work performed by librarians and that performed by support staff " (9). Another assertion is the reasonable assumption that "task overlap also creates resentment among support staff, who see themselves performing the same duties librarians perform, only for less money and less prestige" (10).

The ethical ramifications of the distinctions between library professionals and library support staff are discussed more fully in Thomas J. Froehlich's article, "Ethical Considerations Regarding Library Nonprofessionals: Competing Perspectives and Values." Froehlich argues that if stakeholders from both groups would fairly consider other stakeholders' perspectives, the library professional would better understand the nonprofessional's concern over a lack of equal compensation for seemingly equal work. Likewise, the nonprofessional would better empathize with the professional's fear that remedies for pay discrepancies and role blurring, such as easy support staff certification programs, could devalue their professional education (11).

As Wilson and Hermanson note in "Educating and Training Library Practitioners," library support staff have reached a critical mass of group self-awareness "in terms of ability to organize and to draw attention from those who service the needs of library workers" (12). In 1996, the Executive Board of the ALA Support Staff Interests Round Table (SSIRT) appointed a Strategic Planning Process Steering Committee to identify the most pressing needs of support staff and to develop strategies to address these needs. From over 1900 support staff surveyed, the three most pressing needs identified were (1) career ladders (few opportunities for advancement), (2) compensation not appropriate to level of education, and (3) access to continuing education and training opportunities. These concerns were divided among three task forces that were asked to analyze a particular issue, develop implementable solutions, and report their recommendations to the SSIRT Executive Board for review and adoption (13).

Among the many comments offered by the task forces is the recognition that the three primary needs are interdependent. Access to continuing education and training is viewed as essential to advancement in the library profession and to better compensation. Holly Blosser points out in the final report of the ALA/SSIRT Task Force on Access to Continuing Education and Training Opportunities, that staff have difficulty discussing one issue without touching the others (14).

Like the other groups, the Task Force on Access to Continuing Education and Training Opportunities found it necessary to solicit more information from support staff. Respondents to this group's survey on the educational needs of support staff reported that the technological changes and advancements in libraries have created a great need for training to keep up with new technologies. The report acknowledges that priority for training has often been given to professional staff; however, "support staff need to be given the same opportunities to succeed in their jobs as professionals are given" (15). Paraprofessional certification programs are also suggested as a means to insure staff exposure to standardized core competencies and as a possible mechanism for rewarding continuing education with salary increases (16).

Although the ALA-SSIRT Task Force on Compensation admits to being overwhelmed with the broad scope of their assigned issue, their initial observation is that while support staff salaries vary greatly, they "are consistently and significantly lower than librarian salaries and apparently are not affected to a great degree by changes (i.e. additions) to job responsibilities" (17). This task force recommends an accredited national certification program for library support staff and a new personnel utilization plan that accounts for advancing skill levels when staff participate in training programs. The task force feels that this new personnel utilization plan would encourage the "standardization of titles, responsibility and skill and training levels." Perhaps this group's most interesting recommendation is for libraries to "unlink" library support staff positions from clerical classifications, recognizing the disconnect between the term "clerical" and the actual work these employees are doing. This task force suggests that librarians "investigate appropriate comparable positions in the public and private sectors to which support staff pay levels may be linked" (18).

Appropriately, the ALA-SSIRT Task Force on Career Ladders begin their report with a definition of a career ladder and discussion of the differences between a career and a job. They determine that a person approaches a job as if it were a career when the worker is "motivated to search for ways to improve job performance and work conditions," when the worker is "willing to speak up when they have an idea even though it may be difficult," and when the worker views the job as a "permanent calling" that requires special training. The task force recognizes that the choice between viewing work as a job or as a career is largely up to the individual worker (19).

Any career ladder program proposed should emphasize the individual's need to take control of his or her career, not leave it to the institution. Careers will happen when we have a mechanism in place by which we can quantify our qualifications (certification) and progress (career ladders). We will have careers when our bosses recognize that to do our work well we need more than on-the-job training given second and third hand by someone who attended a workshop and has photocopies of the handouts to share. We will have careers when we recognize that we need to take responsibility for our own progress by reading the journals of the profession and supporting those groups that do work to advance the standards of our profession. We will have careers when we care that the standards of our profession are upheld no matter what. We will have a career when we are paid a living wage. (20)

The recognition that a career ladder will demand active participation and additional responsibilities from both the individual employee and the institution is critical. "Library organizations need to recognize their obligations towards employees at all levels in the organization" including, "fair and equitable job analysis and evaluation, opportunities for advancement and use of skills, fair pay scales, [and] opportunities for skill development and promotion" (21). However, career-minded support staff members will solely be responsible for taking advantage of the opportunities for skill development created by their libraries.

Further proof of the library community's attempts to understand and address the issues identified by the ALA-SSIRT Survey of 1997 is found in the ALA's 3rd Congress on Professional Education: Focus on Library Support Staff (COPE III). Held May 16-17, 2003, at the College of DuPage (IL), COPE III invited approximately 50 library support staff, 50 library directors/librarians, and 50 librarians/human resources

personnel to discuss professional education for library support staff. While education remained the focus, the discussions and recommendations of this conference involved disparate topics such as

• A needs assessment survey that would suggest ways the ALA can better meet support staff needs

• The creation and preservation of "an environment within ALA for support staff that would be a model for state and local library associations"

• A process that would allow research agendas on support staff issues to be forwarded within ALA and to outside groups such as graduate students

• The need for programming within ALA that is "geared toward support staff issues"

• "ALA's career recruitment efforts should include all library workers"

• "ALA should appoint a taskforce to establish a career ladder for support staff…"

• ALA should include support staff salaries in its annual Salary Survey

• Investigate the feasibility of a voluntary national support staff certification program

• "Scholarships, fellowships, and other opportunities should be established for library workers who are continuing their formal education…" (22)

Further research on many of these topics has been assigned to various committees. While some of the reports have been presented to the ALA Council, most are still being developed. As these reports are made public, the renewed interest in these topics is certain to grow. Two Tennessee delegates to COPE III, Sue Knoche and Jill Keally, presented "ALA COPE III for Library Support Staff: Bringing it Home to Tennessee" at the 2004 TLA Conference in Knoxville, TN. Throughout this presentation these delegates stressed the need to work within Tennessee to further the national goals embodied in the COPE III recommendations. They encouraged participation in this present survey as a means of determining the current status and concerns of support staff in Tennessee (23).

Methodology

In 2004, the Tennessee Library Association Paraprofessional Roundtable (TLA-PPRT) conducted a survey to identify issues of concern to the support staff working in Tennessee libraries. While the results have been used to guide the agenda of the TLA-PPRT, they also add a Tennessee voice to the national discussion of the evolving library professional/library support staff working relationship and serve as an indicator of the progress made in addressing known problems. This survey was created by combining elements of the ALA-LSSIRT Survey of 1997, a survey conducted by Sherly Gerdwagen's Berkeley College Library Staff, and questions proposed by members of TLA-PPRT (24, 25).

The survey was distributed at the 2003 Tennessee Library Association Conference in Chattanooga, via the TLA discussion list, and upon request. Initial recipients were encouraged to replicate and further distribute the survey. A total of 146 valid responses were returned in individual mailings, collective

mailings, delivered by hand, and sent via electronic mail. Regardless of delivery mechanism, all responses were standardized into a print format and then transcribed into an Excel spreadsheet. Questions were analyzed with the assistance of JMP Statistical Discover Software.

In question 21 respondents were asked to rank, from a list of previously identified concerns, five issues affecting support staff that should receive the highest priority from TLA-PPRT in their strategic planning. Responses were analyzed by assigning each concern its own column and each case its own row. The ranked responses were entered in their corresponding cell. Values were assigned with a value of 5 entered for each concern ranked as number one, a value of 4 for each concern ranked as number two, a value of 3 for each concern ranked as number three and so on. The values for each column were then added together to determine the overall ranking of concerns. The survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

Results

Demographic Information

(Questions 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14)

Respondents represent a wide range of Tennessee libraries. Most work in public or academic libraries, with only two coming from elementary or high school libraries and one from a special library (see Chart 1). The number of patrons served by these libraries varies widely, though. Seventeen percent report working in libraries that provide service to fewer than 5,000 patrons, while nine percent report that their libraries provide service to more than 1,000,000 patrons. Fifty-one percent of respondents work in libraries that serve communities of between 5,000 and 99,999 patrons (See Chart 2).

Chart 1: Library Type

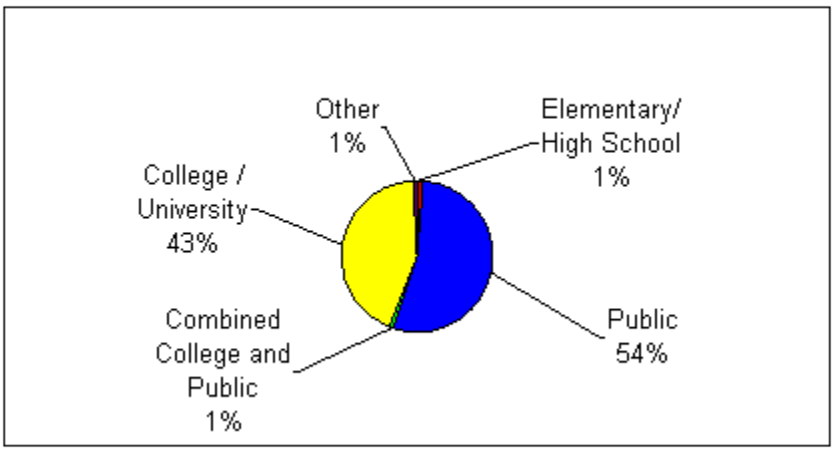
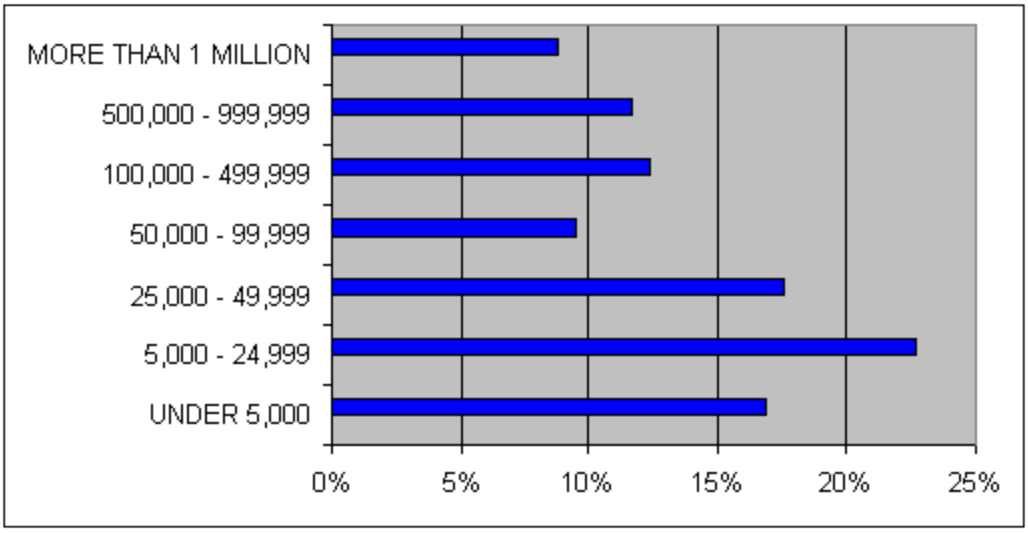
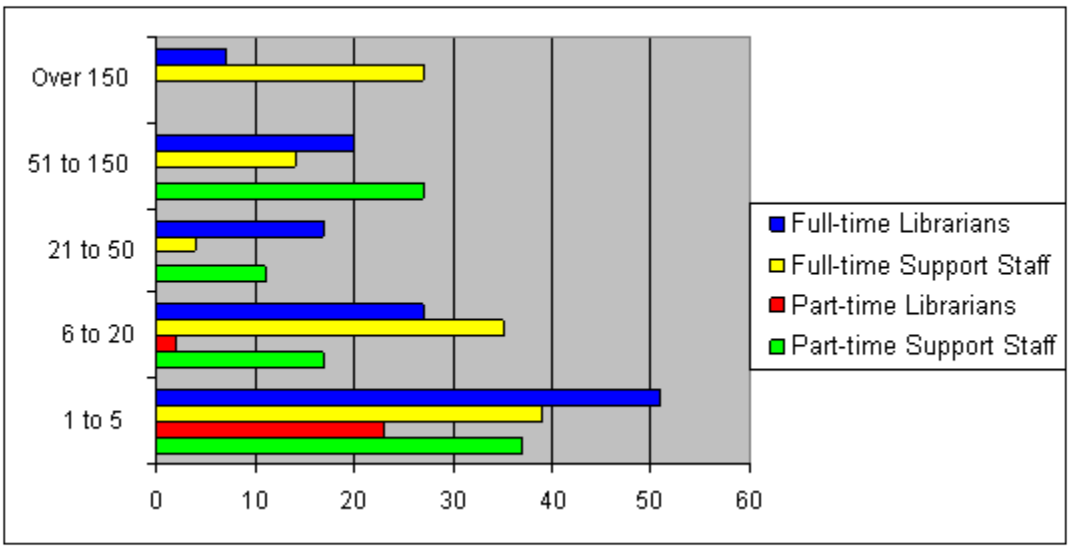


Chart 2: Population Served by Respondents' Libraries



The number of librarians, support staff, and part-time employees working in the respondents' libraries ranges widely. Forty-eight report having fewer than five full-time librarians in their libraries while 27 have over 140; the mean is 38. Only 16 report having fewer than five full-time support staff while 27 report having over 195. The mean for this group is 63. Thirty-four have fewer than five part-time support staff working in their libraries while 27 have over 110. The mean is 39.8 part-time support staff. Only two report having any part-time librarians in their libraries and both of these have fewer than five (See Chart 3).

Chart 3: Allocation of Personnel

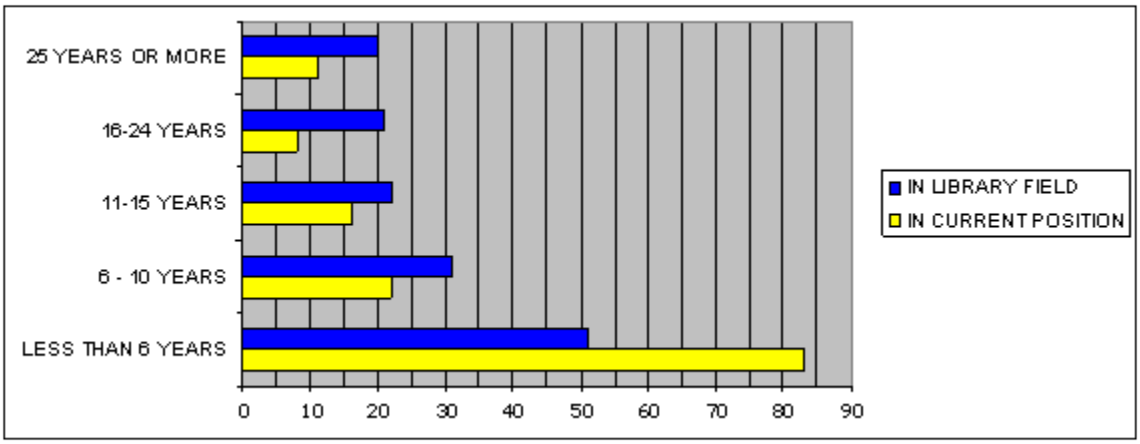


The individuals who responded to this survey include veteran staff who have worked in libraries for over 15 years (45 years is the longest) and staff who have worked only a few months in the library field.

Members from both of these groups and those that fall between are almost equally represented. Thirty-five percent of respondents (51 individuals) have worked in libraries for fewer than 6 years, 37 percent (53 individuals) for 6 to 15 years, and 28 percent (41 individuals) for 16 or more years (See Chart 4). The median response is 8 to 10 years in the library field.

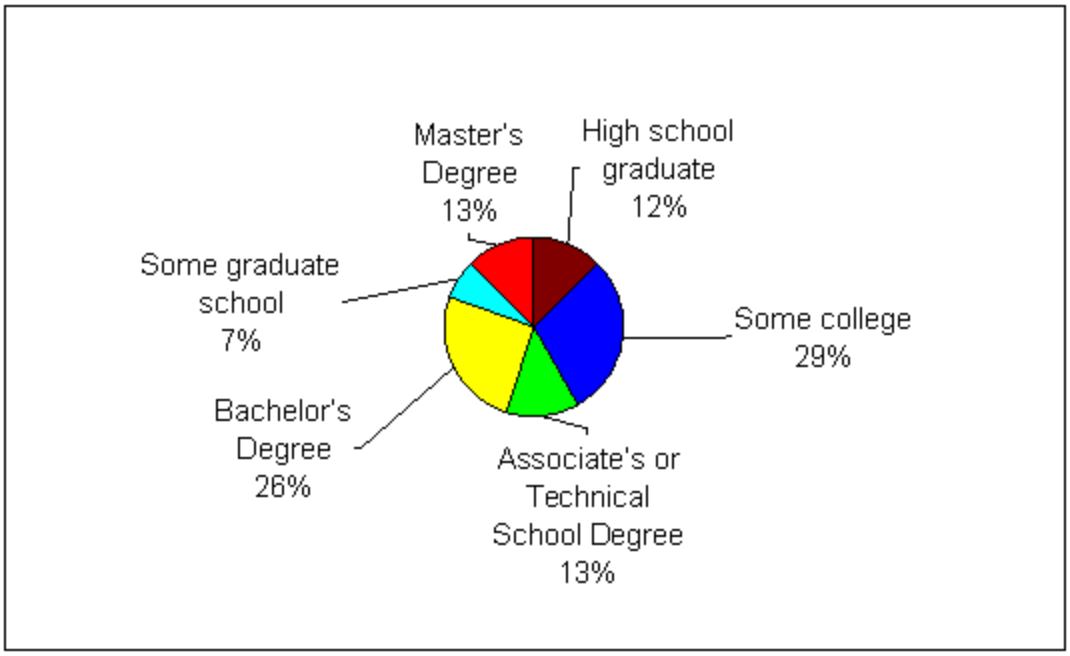
In contrast, respondents show a median of only three to five years in their current positions. Fifty-nine percent (83 individuals) have been in their current position for less than six years, 27 percent (38 individuals) for 6 to 15 years, and 14 percent (19 individuals) for 16 or more years. Obviously, many respondents are changing positions at least once during their library careers.

Chart 4: Years in Libraries (Respondents)



As might be expected, 57 percent of respondents have earned a post high school degree, and a mere 12 percent report having only a high school education (See Chart 5). The most frequently selected category (30%) is “some college,” which was closely followed by bachelor’s degree (26%). Six (4.2%) of those who have master’s degrees have MLS degrees and four (2.8 percent) have two master’s degrees.

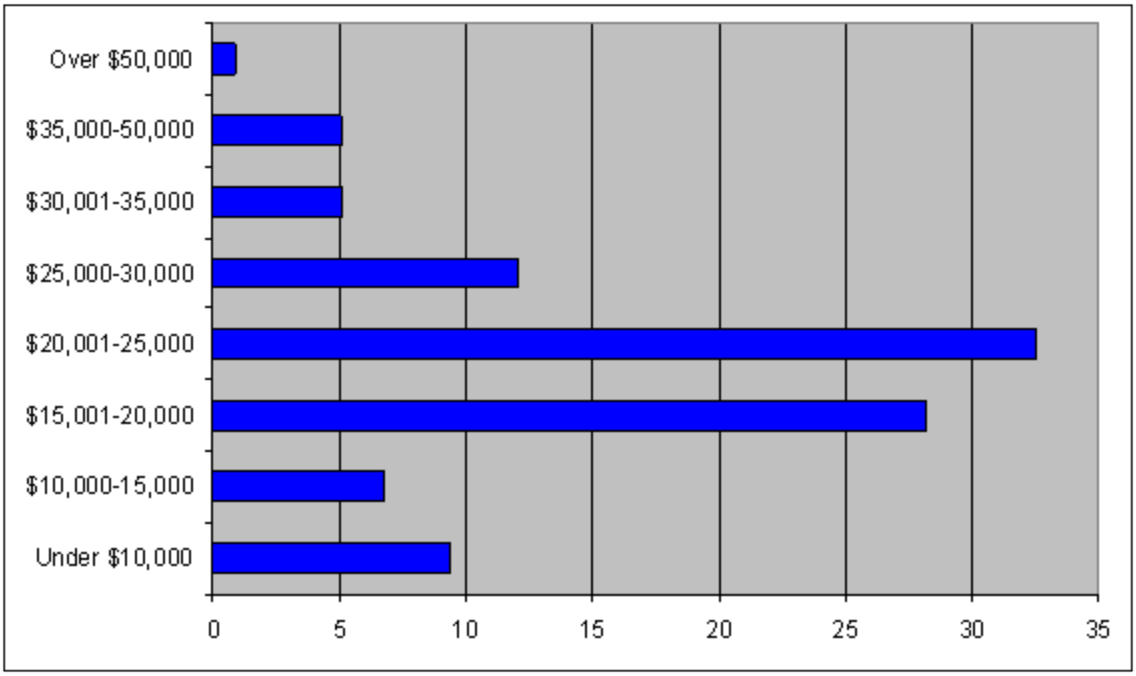
Chart 5: Highest Level of Education



While respondents have achieved high levels of education, only sixteen (11.1%) are currently attending school and only three explicitly state that they are pursuing a Master's Degree in Information Science. Other responses include "Business Management," "M.A. in Discipleship of Christian Formation," "Office Management," "Social Work," and "Nursing – BSN." Five are pursuing degrees in Education.

Respondents' annual salaries are primarily clustered in the $15,000 to $30,000 range with 61 percent earning between $15,000 and $25,000 (See Chart 6). Since part-time workers were not asked to identify themselves, it is possible that the 9 percent who earn less than $10,000 are actually part-time workers. It is worth noting that only 13 respondents (11%) earn more than $30,001. However, when asked if they are being fairly compensated for the skills and knowledge they possess, those surveyed offer a mixed opinion. Fifty-three percent feel they are compensated at least "fairly well" (45.1%) while 47 percent would characterize how they are compensated as either "not very well" (34.5%) or "poorly" (12.7%).

Chart 6: Annual Salary



Support Staff Jobs

(Questions 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12)

Answers to the question, "What is your exact job title?" show the lack of standardization in this area. While almost every respondent provides a job title, there were 87 different responses to this question with only 14 job titles claimed by more than one person. These responses are used in relation to the question on principal job duties to determine the primary functional area of respondents.

Table 1: Primary Functional Area

Primary Functional Area	**Count**	**Percentage**
Circulation	51	35.4
Multiple Areas	30	20.8
Technical Services	25	17.4
Reference	10	6.9
Specialist	9	6.2
Administrative Assistant	6	4.2

Government Documents	5	3.5
Serials	4	2.8
Systems	4	2.8

Respondents report having duties in a wide range of areas inside and outside of their primary functional area: acquisitions, cataloging/ processing, reference, interlibrary loan, circulation, serials, technology/ webmaster, internet searching, and clerical. They also report duties involving: archives, reserve, mail room, displays, budget preparation and spending, personnel issues, accounting, preparing financial statements, managing databases, children's services, inventory, catalog maintenance, repairs, non-print materials and equipment, preservation, training, material services, programming, memorial maintenance, counseling, evaluations, microfilm, building maintenance and custodial oversight, time sheets, bank deposits, receptionist, personnel records, employee benefits, payroll deposits, bank reconciliation, trustee reports, collection development, weeding, government documents, supervising and training computer lab assistants, periodicals non-print, volunteer and practicum management, accessing donations, contact with donors, copy center, security at closing, manual revisions, committee work, branch maintenance, policy and procedure writing and revision, and special projects.

Eighty respondents (55.1%) supervise others while 65 (44.8%) have no supervisory duties. Those respondents who do supervise, report supervising between one and 78 employees. The average is 8.7 employees, but the most frequently chosen response is one employee. Fifty percent supervise fewer than five employees and 75 percent supervise fewer than ten. While some separated student workers and volunteers from full-time staff, others did not, so these numbers represent the total number of employees of any classification under the respondents' supervision.

With this multitude of duties to be performed, it is not surprising to find that 74 percent of respondents have been cross-trained. Forty-eight respondents have been cross trained in circulation, 40 in reference, 38 in internet searching, 21 in cataloging/processing, 21 in interlibrary loan, 21 in serials, 19 in acquisitions, and 14 in technology or as webmaster.

Similarly, 76 percent report that their responsibilities have increased since starting their current position, 23 percent report no change, while only one respondent (0.6%) reports a decrease in responsibilities. Responsibilities are most likely to have increased in circulation, followed closely by clerical, and then cataloging. Responsibilities are least likely to have increased in serials, followed closely by acquisitions, then interlibrary loan.

Even though responsibilities seem to be increasing for a majority of support staff, 75 percent do not feel that they are likely to advance in their current position. In fact, when asked if there is room for advancement in their current position, 45 percent choose to characterize this possibility as "very unlikely." Twenty-one percent thought that they were "somewhat likely" to advance, but only four percent view this possibility as "very likely."

These opinions stand in contrast to respondents' more positive feelings concerning the likelihood of their library hiring from within to fill higher paying staff positions. A full 80 percent believe that their library will hire from within when filling these positions and only seven percent believe this to be a "very unlikely" possibility.

Training

(Questions 17, 19)

Respondents indicate that most libraries seem to be taking steps to train support staff. When asked how often their library offers in-house training workshops, 60 percent respond either "somewhat frequently" (37%) or "very frequently" (23%). However, 19 percent feel that they are offered such opportunities very infrequently.

Those surveyed also point out that many libraries do not offer their support staff members a continuing education program. Sixty-nine respondents (55%) report that their libraries do not offer any continuing education program for library support staff. Tuition funding from those libraries that do offer continuing education seems to vary. Forty-one percent of those respondents whose libraries provide such funding indicate that their libraries pay 100 percent of the tuition. Fewer than 15 percent work in libraries that offer partial funding. The fact that the largest percentage (43%) are unsure of what percentage of tuition their library pays may reveal how few employees pursue this option or may suggest that many respondents did not understand what was meant by "continuing education program."

Ranking of Concerns

(Question 21)

In question 21, respondents are asked to examine a list of previously identified support staff concerns and to select five that should receive the highest priority from TLA-PPRT. They are also invited to list other issues of concern. The top ranked concerns follow:

1. Compensation not appropriate to level of education, experience, and responsibilities

2. Career ladders (few opportunities for advancement)

3. Access to continuing education and training opportunities

4. Lack of a paraprofessional certification program

5. Lack of recognition for contributions to libraries and librarianship

A sample of the concerns offered as "other" include

• "Animosity between staff and library board."

• "The hours that library support staff work should not be based upon a school's enrollment. Because a school has fewer than 500 students does not necessarily mean that there is less work to perform, just

fewer hours to get work done in. Our school uses the accelerated reading program and since this program was installed, my workload has increased three to four times my previous workload, especially the circulation, shelving, and repair duties. "

• "Too hard to get a circulation supervisor position. Small branches doing the same as large branches but the clerk is not being recognized as the supervisor but doing the same jobs as a circulation supervisor which is not fair. We don't have the same pay but both [have the] same responsibilities."

• "What steps are needed to advance to the next level or job title."

• "Library assistants doing exactly the same job as librarians with no recognition for this or attempt at comparable compensation."

• "There is no flexibility in the system for managers to promote staff to higher titles even if they wish to."

Suggestions to Change/Improve the Working Environment for Library Support Staff

(Question 22)

What follows are sample responses on various issues.

On issues of pay equity and lack of opportunities for advancement:

• "Lack of adequate pay could be considered a link to employee apathy toward their positions. Work loads increase due to budget cuts, but there is no recognition, monetarily or otherwise, for that added responsibility. Also, the inability for job advancement is a real concern. With inadequate pay for your current position and the inability to advance to a higher paying position, employee moral[e] significantly decreases, offering employees little motivation to strive for excellence when they know ultimately they will not be rewarded for it."

• "If a degree is required for a position, compensate accordingly or lower the education requirement and opt for on the job training"

• "Increase pay; recognition of qualifications (in contrast to credentials – A piece of paper)"

• "Better pay, pay based on performance, performance promotions"

• "Eliminate compression of salaries"

• "Compensation for evening and weekend work"

On issues of education or training:

• "I would make sure there was a paraprofessional certification program in place and support staff had access to continuing education to achieve certification"

• "Working environment great, but nighttime workers are often less-involved in recreational [activities] and education - their choice or their circumstance"

• "Implement career ladder for circulation supervisor, certification programs, cross-training with reference staff"

• "Give more incentives to acquire more skills through staff training or tuition support to take classes. To define definite job responsibilities for each support staff position and give support staff the pay a professional would be paid if they are doing the job a professional would assume if hired."

• "Have travel funds available for [library support] staff to attend TLA, ALA, or other conferences/workshops that are beneficial to staff development. Have the library consider paying memberships for staff on a revolving basis."

• "Release time for attending a credit course offered on campus."

• "Be more thorough w/ training. Figuring out the job on your own is unnerving."

On issues of respect and decision-sharing

• "It is my impression that many librarians see themselves as exclusive and much more "enlightened" than support staff in money, title, and prestige; there is a great distance"

• "Morale is a big issue. I would like to see more team-building activities."

• "Thanks to our new dean of libraries we have established a support staff organization. It is a good vehicle for staff to express their concerns and have open discussions."

• "Recognition for the role of support staff in libraries. Some people with degrees can do less than those support staff without library degrees. I think support staff should be paid for the job they do and receive the options for benefits, such as tenure, that faculty librarians receive"

• "There is a definite lack of respect for paraprofessionals at my library"

• "For the professionals to recognize our skills and opinions more readily"

• "Give [support staff members] more participation in staff and faculty evaluation processes"

• "Allow staff to participate in decisions affecting library duties and procedures"

On “role blurring”:

• "Seems to be a lack of knowledge [among] both support staff and librarians as to what each "really" does. Need more communication (eg; what I do when I shelve, checkout,etc.)"

• "More clearly defined job roles"

• "The overall working environment our library is good-I really enjoy the library environment. The major problem I see is a disparity in the types of work being performed by support staff with the same titles. There are library associates with a great deal of responsibility, and others who don't have nearly as much that they're responsible for. There are also staff in the library associate title who have skills and experience that far exceed their titles-who are writing articles, coordinating public events, overseeing collections, making significant administrative improvements. I and other staff in my title have been told by our manager that she wishes she could promote us but she's unable to do so. I'm certain that our responsibility level is similar to that of folks in the next title level. It's not that I don't feel appreciated, it's just frustrating to know that [your] responsibility level isn't matched by your salary-and I wouldn't [necessarily] want less responsibility."

On library boards:

• "Have a library board that supports the libraries and the staff and support staff; not a board that has its own agenda."

• "Have a library board that would support our library and not special interest groups."

Membership in Professional Organizations and Unions

(Questions 2, 23, 24)

The fact that Tennessee is a “right to work” state is reaffirmed by the survey. Only two respondents claim union membership; however, the other responses of one of these suggest that he or she misunderstood the question leaving with only one respondent who claims union membership.

Tennessee support staff are either more willing or more able to join professional library organizations than unions. Twenty-six respondents (28%) report that they belong to a professional library organization, but 54 (59%) report that they do not. In addition to the 26 who report that they belong to a professional library organization, 11 (12%) belong to their library’s staff organization.

Respondents reported belonging to 11 different professional organizations including

Boone Tree Library Organization (3)

Association of Christian Librarians (1)

American Library Association (10)

Tennessee Library Association (19)

Special Libraries Association (1)

Association of Research Libraries (1)

Music Library Association (1)

Southeast Chapter of the Music Library Association (2)

Music OCLC Users Group (1)

Memphis Area Library Council (8)

Public Library Association (1)

It is worth noting that 86 percent of those surveyed do not belong to the Tennessee Library Association. Uncertainty concerning eligibility to join TLA and the benefits of joining seem to be the primary factors respondents report for not joining. Concerns over the cost of membership and the amount of time required are also frequently mentioned. A sample of reasons why respondents choose not to join the TLA include the following:

Unaware of Eligibility or Benefits (28 responses)

• "Was not aware membership available to staff other than professionals - library administration has not encouraged it."

• "What can it do for me?"

• "Can part time employees become members?"

• "I have not researched and found out details about the organization."

• "Didn't know it existed."

• "I always consider this an organization for those in higher positions than I."

• "I haven't really thought about it and I thought it was only for librarians or persons with a library degree."

• "Never encouraged to join, always thought it was only for librarians, didn't know there was a paraprofessional unit in TLA."

• "Never discussed joining, library doesn't pay."

• "To be honest, no one has ever informed us that we could (or should for that matter) belong to it."

• "This is the first time I've ever heard of it."

• "I don't see any benefits to belonging to offset the cost of joining."

• "Info on this (to us) is limited."

• "Previous lack of support for support staff. Certification for support staff has been talked about for some time now and it doesn't appear to be any closer to reality. I am hoping to retire this year so

certification will not help me but there are many other support staff in Tennessee who deserve the opportunity to achieve this status."

• "I don't feel that TLA has anything to offer me."

• "There appeared to be little benefit for "apples" other than reduced cost of conference. Many issues emphasized are philosophical and not necessarily practical."

Membership Fees (12 Responses)

• "I can't afford any extras right now."

• "Library only pays for professionals"

• "I wasn't sure of the membership fees (how much, if I could afford it, if the library would help pay), and I wouldn't be taken to TLA conferences anyway unless they are nearby. I probably will join within the next year."

• "Working for the state, cost is always a factor when raises are given so seldom and when the cost of insurance and parking always increases when our pay does. With the new cost structure I may reconsider joining this year."

• "Membership dues are not affordable."

Time Constraints (5)

• "Time with family is more important. Also I do not have the extra money to devote to TLA. Sorry!"

• "Retired from lifetime occupation. This library work takes a lot of physical energy. Finances [are] a concern. Have many responsibilities and interests outside of library."

• "At the present, I am the mother of a 7 year old who attends lessons twice a week, a two year old whom I can't hardly catch, and a six month old who is spoiled. My hands are full. I can barely get a bath at night."

• "If not, why? I stay extremely busy at work and do not have time to do TLA work in addition."

New to Field or Library (4)

• "Just started working in this field."

• "Haven’t really considered it. Am new to town, to this job, and to the library field in general."

Other (10)

• "Joined about 8 years ago - signed up for the paraprofessional round-table and was never contacted. The only contact was the newsletter. I wanted to be involved."

• "Have not enrolled because not germaine to what I am doing as an archivist."

• "Don’t think it offers opportunity for my profession. I am planning to join."

• "Not considered a professional by the group as a whole. The support staff arm offers little. Workshops are too basic, simplistic, condescending."

• "As Music Cataloger my needs are more efficiently addressed by Music Library Association and Southeast Chapter and Music OCLC Users Group."

• "Library is member but not individuals."

Comments

(Question 25)

• "Continuing education and training opportunities would be great. I would like to earn the MLS, but UTK is nearest school and it's too far to commute. My home computer isn't very good - would like assistance in taking online course."

• "I had a hard time on #21. I am very happy working at [my] county library. I see no major problems, just minor personality conflicts. It’s a great place to work! My only real complaint is we don't make enough money. We work here for other types of fulfillment, I guess. I love that we have an hourly schedule [in which] we change where we work every hour. Keeps us fresh! Keeps us from getting bored."

• "I do intend to join TLA in the near future."

• "Would really love to see more conferences for support staff in the TN area, [and] certification."

• "I work on the reference desk doing exactly the same things that librarians are doing. My compensation is $9.86/hr [while] librarians' compensation start around $21.57/hr. Doesn’t this go against the equal pay act or fair pay act?"

Discussion

As these survey results illustrate, support staff in Tennessee libraries share many of the concerns that have been previously mentioned and explored in the professional literature. All three of the highest ranked concerns of the 1997 ALA-SSIRT survey have yet to be adequately addressed in Tennessee. Only the order has changed slightly. The lack of adequate compensation now ranks as the most pressing concern in the Tennessee study where the lack of career ladders (number 2 in the Tennessee rankings) is viewed as most pressing in the ALA study. Both studies rank access to continuing education and training opportunities as the third most pressing issue.

Finding “compensation not appropriate to level of education, experience, and responsibilities” clearly the most recognized concern is not entirely a surprise in Tennessee. It is common knowledge that education has been historically under-funded in this state. Educators are frequently forced to drive

across state lines to find a well-paying job. Since appropriate compensation for library support staff is a nation-wide concern, it makes sense that this would be a larger issue in Tennessee. That said, when respondents are asked if they feel they are being fairly compensated for the skills and knowledge they possess, 52 percent choose either "fairly well" or "very well." Respondents to the question involving salary further fill in this financial picture. Sixty-one percent earn between $15,000 and $25,000, 17 percent earn between $25,000 and $35,000, while only six percent earn over $35,000. Approximately 44 percent of respondents earn less than $19,157 annually, the 2004 poverty threshold for a family of four as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (26).

The concern that there are no career ladders and few opportunities for advancement is reinforced by responses to the question, "Is there room for advancement in your position?" This question, where roughly 75 percent feel that advancement in their current position is unlikely, is interesting to compare to the question, "Since you started working in your current position, have your responsibilities increased, decreased, or remained about the same?" Seventy-six percent report that their responsibilities have increased, 23 percent report that their responsibilities have remained about the same, while only 1 (0.6%) reports a decrease. The majority of respondents (74%) are cross-trained to perform duties outside the range of their regular duties. This disparity between respondents' perceived inability to advance in their current position and the increase of duties experienced by most workers leads toward the question of whether, in today's rapidly changing library environment, workers are just expected to embrace new responsibilities without expecting a promotion or an increase in financial compensation.

Those surveyed must find reasons to believe that they may be promoted, though. When asked, "How likely is your library to hire from within when filling higher paying staff positions," 80 percent of those surveyed respond either "somewhat" or "very likely." The fact that the majority believe that they cannot advance in their current position but conversely believe that their libraries hire from within when filling higher paying positions may show their recognition that not all departments have higher paying staff positions to advance into. More research could explore this apparent discrepancy.

The third most pressing concern identified in both the TLA and the ALA survey, "access to continuing education and training opportunities," is further analyzed by the question, "How often does your library offer opportunities such as in-house training workshops for support staff to learn new skills?" Respondents to this question suggest that all libraries are not doing an equal job in this area. While 60 percent choose either "very frequently" or "somewhat frequently," 40 percent characterize the frequency of their training opportunities as either "somewhat infrequently" or "very infrequently." These responses seems at odds with the replies to the cross-training question; if staff are expected to keep up in this rapidly changing workplace while also constantly taking on new duties, shouldn't there be frequent opportunities for continuing education for all library workers?

This problem could be compounded by the fact that only 44 percent of those surveyed report that their libraries have a continuing education program. In the follow-up question exploring the amount of funding libraries contribute to such a program, the top response was "unsure" followed closely by "100%." As noted earlier, the wording for this question in the current survey may have confused some

of the recipients. However, since the literature and many of the responses point to a greater than ever need for support staff training, the opportunities and funding for continuing education for support staff is an important topic for Tennessee libraries that merits continued research.

While libraries could probably do a better job informing their employees of educational benefits, the support staff community may not be pursuing these opportunities. Of the 143 respondents to the question, “Are you currently attending school?” only 16 (11%) answered “yes” and just three are studying information science. It is interesting to note that these three are also among the 19 who are members of TLA.

The three problems of highest concern to support staff in Tennessee are often on the minds of administrators and library directors as well. Administrators have a great need to retain talented and well-trained workers. Today’s leaders are seeking resolutions for problems that encourage workers to leave the libraries for better opportunities elsewhere. Future studies should monitor how these present concerns are being addressed by library administrators, and if solutions are keeping workers in the library as career-employees.

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Appendix A:

The Tennessee Library Association Paraprofessional Roundtable (TLA-PPRT) is conducting a survey to identify issues of concern to the support staff in Tennessee. You do not need to be a member in order to participate in this survey. Please take a few minutes to complete the following survey.

1. What type of library do you work in?

____College/University Library (Privately Funded) ___College/University Library (Publicly Funded)

____Elementary/High School Library ___Public Library

____Other (specify) _____ ___Hospital/Medical Center Library

2. How long have you worked in the library field? _____

3. What is your exact job title? _____

4. What are your principle job duties (check all that apply) : ___ Acquisitions ___ Cataloging/Processing ___ Reference

___ Interlibrary Loan ___ Circulation ___ Serials ___ Technology/Webmaster ___ Internet Searching ___

Other (please specify) _____

5. In addition to your regular duties are you cross trained? ___ Yes ___ No

a. If yes in what area (check all that apply): ___ Acquisitions ___ Cataloging/Processing ___ Circulation

___ Interlibrary Loan ___ Reference ___ Serials ___ Technology/Webmaster ___ Internet Searching

Other (please specify) _____

6. How long have you been in this position?

___ Less than one year ___ 1-2 years ___ 3-5 years ___ 5 + years / How many? ___ years

7. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

____High school graduate ____Some college ____ Associate's Degree ____Bachelor's Degree

____Some graduate school ____Master's Degree-MLS ____Master's Degree-Other ____Ph.D.

8. Are you currently attending school? ____ Yes ____ No If yes, what program _____

9. Are you: (check all that apply) ___Union ___Non-union ___City ___ State ___County ___ Federal

___ Other (please specify) _____

10. Do you supervise the work of others? ___Yes ___No If yes, how many? _____

11. Since you started working in your current position, have your responsibilities

___ Increased ___ Decreased ___ Remained about the same

12. If your responsibilities have increased which activity are you doing more of? (check all that apply)

___ Acquisitions ___ Cataloging/Processing ___ Circulation ___ Clerical ___ Interlibrary Loan

___ Reference ___ Serials ___ Technology/Webmaster ___ Internet Searching ___

Other responsibilities (please specify) _____

13. What is the total population served by your library?

¬¬____ Fewer than 5,000 ____ 5,000-9,999 ____ 10,000-24,999 ____ 25,000-49,999 ____ 50,000-99,999

____ 100,000-249,999 ____ 250,000-499,999 ____ 500,000-999,999 ___ 1,000,000 or more

14. Approximately how many employees work are at your library: Full time: Professionals _____; Support Staff ____

Part time: Professionals _____; Support Staff _____

15. Is there room for advancement in your position?

____ Very likely ____Somewhat likely ____Somewhat unlikely ____ Very unlikely

16. How likely is your library to hire from within when filling higher paying staff positions?

____ Very likely ____Somewhat likely ____Somewhat unlikely ____ Very unlikely

17. How often does your library offer opportunities such as in-house training workshops for support staff to learn new skills? ____ Very frequently ____Somewhat frequently ____Somewhat infrequently ____ Very infrequently

18. Do you feel that you are being compensated fairly for the skills and knowledge you possess?

____ Very well ____ Fairly well ____ Not very well ___ Poorly

19. Does your library have a continuing education program for library assistants? ____ Yes ____ No

a. (If yes) What percentage of the tuition does the library pay for library assistants?

____ 100% ____ 75-99% ____ 50-74% ____ Under 50% ____ Unsure

20. What salary range most closely matches your annual salary? (*OPTIONAL***)**

____ under $10,000 ____ $10,000-15,000 ____ $15,001-20,000 ____ $20,001-25,000

____ $25,000-30,000 ____ $30,001-35,000 ____ $35,000-50,000 ____ over $50,000

21. Below is a list of issues that have been previously identified as concerns facing the library support

staff community. Please rank what FIVE issues should receive the highest priority from TLA-PPRT in their upcoming strategic planning. (1=highest, 2=next highest, etc.)

____ a. Access to continuing education and training opportunities

____ b. Lack of support ($$, release time) from library for continuing education and training opportunities

____ c. Apathy of support staff (not wanting to get involved)

____ d. Lack of a Paraprofessional Certification Program

____ e. Career ladders (few opportunities for advancement)

____ f. No agreement on appropriate terminology

____ g. Compensation not appropriate to level of education, experience and responsibilities

____ h. Lack of recognition for contributions to libraries and librarianship

____ i. Undefined roles of support staff or librarians

____ j. Limited access to participate in decisions that affect their job

____ k. Outsourcing

____ l. No basic general education requirement for support staff positions

____ m. Lack of support staff representation on decision-making committees at library

____ n. Lack of benefits (not wages)

____ o. Keeping up with technological changes

____ p. Responsibility for library operations but no authority to shape those operations

____ q. Morale

____ r. OTHER (please specify) _____

If not listed above, which issues would you like the TLA PPRT to address?

_____

_____

22. What would you do to change/improve the working environment for Library Support Staff?

23. Do you belong to a library organization(s), please list: _____

24. Are you a member of the Tennessee Library Association? ____ Yes ____ No If not, why?

25. Other comments? (Please feel free to continue on back)

Name _____(Optional)

Library _____ (Optional)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

This survey has been created using elements of: the ALA-LSSIRT Survey of 1997, a survey conducted by Sheryl Gerdwagen's Berkeley College Library Staff, and questions proposed by members of TLA-PPRT.

Return no later than May 15, 2004 to:

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